L1 Use and Language-Related Episodes (LREs) in an EFL Setting

R. A. Rayati *
Assistant Professor
Mazandaran University, Mazandaran
email: r.rayati@umz.ac.ir

B. Yaqubi
Assistant Professor
Mazandaran University, Mazandaran
email: yaqubi@umz.ac.ir

R. Harsejsani
M. A., TEFL
Mazandaran University, Mazandaran
email: rezvanharsij@yahoo.com

Abstract

Pair and small group work is infrequently welcomed in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classes under the assumption that students tend to use their first language (L1), which is considered detrimental to learning the new language. From sociocultural perspective, however, students' first language is claimed to play the role of an important psychological tool and can facilitate the learning process. Hence, the current study is an investigation to examine the impact of students' L1 use on their collaborative interaction, specifically on the construct of language-related episodes (LREs), in completing form-focused editing tasks in pairs in an EFL context. The findings show that learners' L1 can affect their interactional talk and can play certain socio-cognitive roles such as the provision of explanations for the suggestions made in pair, helping make sense of the utterances, sharing ideas instead of unilateral solutions to linguistic problems, and assisting one another in reaching solutions to the problems at hand. The functions were seen to be all conducive to the pair members' target language development.

1. Introduction

Numerous studies (Bejarano, 1987; Donato, 2004; Long & Porter, 1985; Pica, 1994; Storch, 1998; Swain & Lapkin, 1998, among others) have supported the use of pair and small group work in language classroom. It has been maintained that the use of pair and small group work promotes students' collaboration which is believed to serve important roles in the process of second language acquisition. For instance, drawing on the work of Krashen (1981), Long (1983) argued in his Interaction Hypothesis that comprehensible input is both necessary and sufficient in acquiring a second language which can be obtained in interactions through negotiations of meaning, by means of such mechanisms as confirmation checks, comprehension checks, and clarification requests.

The use of pair and small group work is also advocated indirectly in Vygotsky's sociocultural theory of cognitive development. According to Vygotsky (1978), there are two qualitatively different lines of development, differing in origin: the elementary processes and the higher psychological functions. The former is claimed to be of a biological and the latter of a sociocultural nature. This development of higher psychological functions was Vygotsky's main concern. In Vygotsky's view, social interaction is significant in the growth and development of cognition (cited in Donato & McCormick, 1994). It is in the interaction where a beginner learner moves from his/her actual developmental level to the level of potential development with the help of an expert/teacher (Vygotsky, 1978).

The distance between these two levels, i.e. the actual developmental level and the level of potential development, is referred to as the zone of proximal development (ZPD) (Vygotsky, 1978). Generally speaking, in the ZPD, the less able member receives assistance from the more able person to get to a higher level of cognitive development. According to Wood, Bruner and Ross (1976), this assistance referred to as scaffolding is a process whereby the expert assists the learner in a problem-solving task by taking control over the portion of the task that is beyond the learner's current level of competence, allowing the learner to focus on

the parts within his/her range of ability. According to Vygotsky (1978), it was necessary, as explained above, for the interaction to occur between an expert and a novice so that the former would assist the latter in his/her ZPD. Yet in more recent interpretations of the sociocultural perspective, the concept of ZPD has been expanded to include other forms of collaborative activity such as pair and group work among learners. Wells (1999), for instance, contends that "to learn in the ZPD does not require that there be a designated teacher; whenever people collaborate in an activity, each can assist others, and each can learn from the contributions of the others " (p. 333).

However, it seems that while pair and group work is theoretically justified and strongly recommended to promote second language learning, language teachers in foreign language settings, where learners usually come from the same first language (L1), seem not to be very much in favor of pair and small group work, claiming that learners will automatically shift to their L1 during collaborative activities, which is deemed to be detrimental to language development (see for instance Brooks and Donato, 1994; Carless, 2008). Now the questions are, "Do L2 learners use L1 in their classroom interactions? And if the answer is positive, is it beneficial for or detrimental to their L2 development?" The present study aims to address the answer to the previously-mentioned questions.

1.1 Pedagogical investigations on the use of L1

Studies based on Vygotsky's sociocultural theory of language development (Brooks & Donato, 1994; Centeno-Cortes & Jimenez-Jimenez, 2004; Storch & Wigglesworth, 2003; Scott & Fuente, 2008; Swain & Lapkin, 2000; Upton & Lee-Thompson, 2001) show that L1 is used by L2 learners and it serves significant functions in the process of second language acquisition. For instance, Swain and Lapkin (2000) investigated the use of L1 by the students of two eighth-grade French classes. In one class, the learners worked in pair to perform a dictogloss task and those in the second class did a jigsaw task in pair. They found

that the students' L1 performed several key functions, i.e. assisting students in understanding and managing the task, making them focus on language form, vocabulary use, and overall organization, and helping them to establish the tone and nature of their own collaboration.

Besides, with the aim of investigating how university-level L2 learners of varying proficiency levels benefitted from their L1 to understand reading passages and whether L1 was of any help in the learners' comprehension of the passage, Upton and Lee-Thompson (2001) adopted think-aloud verbal protocols and retrospective interviews on the think-aloud protocols with 10 Japanese and 10 Chinese learners. The results of their study revealed that L1 was actively used by those L2 readers for making sense of the L2 text, for solving problems, and for constructing meaning from the text. They therefore concluded that "thinking about an L2 text in the L1 is a reading strategy that L2 readers do fall back on, to a greater or lesser extent, as the need arises" (p. 484).

Similarly, Storch and Wigglesworth (2003) conducted a study to examine the role of L1 in an ESL context. Twelve learners worked in pairs on a text reconstruction task and a short joint composition task using a graphic prompt. They found that although the learners made little use of their first language, most of them cited that "The L1 would have helped them complete the tasks more efficiently" (p. 767). Hence, they suggested that L2 teachers may need to re-evaluate their views concerning the use of L1 in L2 pair and group work in EFL context.

1.2 Pedagogical investigations related to language related episodes (LREs)

In studying learner-learner's interactional talk, a good number of studies (e.g. Ewald, 2005; Kim, 2008; Ross-Fledman, 2007; Scott and Fuente, 2008; Storch, 1998, 2001, 2007; Swain & Lapkin, 1998) adopted Language-Related Episodes (LREs) put forward by Swain and Lapkin (1995, 1998) to investigate the role that L1 could presumably play in performing linguistic tasks.

As a useful tool in analyzing learners' talk during interaction, a language-related episode (LRE) is any part of a dialogue where a learner either speaks about a language problem s/he encounters while completing a task. She/he solves it correctly or incorrectly, simply solves it correctly or not, or without having explicitly identified it as a problem (Swain & Lapkin, 1998). An LRE occurs when in a dialogue "learners talk about the language they are producing, question their language use, or correct themselves or others" (ibid, p. 326).

Research has been conducted on the effects of different factors on LREs, such as the effect of learner proficiency (Leeser, 2004), gender (Ross-Feldman, 2007), assessment context (Ewald, 2005), and think-aloud protocols (Anton and DiCamilla, 1998). Using L2 writing tasks accomplished by 5 pairs of English-speaking learners of Spanish at the beginner level, Anton and DiCamilla (1998) showed that L1 plays the role of a psychological tool which enables learners to perform three important functions. First, in their study, L1 played the role of scaffolding for members of the group. Second, it was used to establish and maintain intersubjectivity. Finally, L1 showed itself in the form of private speech. It was used to verbalize one's inner speech during accomplishing cognitively difficult activities. Leeser (2004) also examined the effect of learners' proficiency on the incidence of LREs. Participants came from a fourth semester content-based course at university level and were divided into 21 dyads to carry out a dictogloss or a passage reconstruction task and had series of stages. After only listening to a short, dense passage for the first time, learners were told to take notes during the second time, finally they were asked to pool together their notes and reconstruct the text in pairs. During this reconstruction phase, they were expected to produce LREs. Leeser found that higher proficiency learners produced more LREs than those at lower levels. He relates the variation in the number and type of LREs to the relative difference in task demands for the higher and lower proficiency learners.

Besides, Ewald (2005) conducted a study with an overall aim of examining the role of collaborative group assessment on the nature of LREs. She conducted the study using 20 students in seven groups of two or three in a university Spanish class. Analyzing the data which consisted of students' recorded small-group quiz interactions, their written quizzes and students' perspectives on the use of small-group quizzes elicited by a questionnaire, she found that students went beyond just answering the quizzes, and "the nature of their interaction was far more complex than the mere sharing of answers" (p. 571). During the interaction it was found that students analyzed the questions, stated their opinion, exchanged help, debated their ideas, and explored alternatives as well as talked to and corrected both themselves and one another. Students' perspective on the effectiveness of the use of collaborative small-group quiz was positive, though they were somehow worried about how their teacher would assess their performance.

As to the impact of gender and task type on LREs, Ross-Feldman (2007) compared the performance of 32 males and 32 females Spanish participants from an adult English language learning center in a US urban area. Participants were required to work in mixed- and matched-gender dyads on the three tasks of picture story, picture placement, and picture difference. Ross-Feldman found that the number of LREs in male-male dyads was fewer than those of female-female and male-female and the picture story task influenced the incidence of LREs.

And finally, Scott and Fuente (2008) found that L1 plays an important role in the process of second language acquisition. In their study, they intended to discover how learners approached the task. Using consciousness-raising, form-focused grammar tasks, which were administered to two groups of foreign language learners, one with and the other without permission to use L1, Scott and Fuente found that those learners who were allowed to use their L1 worked collaboratively in a balanced and coherent way, but those who had been required to use only the target language showed fragmented interaction and little evidence of collaboration. They argued that exclusive use of the L2 during such tasks

may impose cognitive demands on learners that have negative impacts on the language acquisition.

However, despite the great quantity of research carried out on the outcome of L1 use in developing L2, very few studies seem to have examined the impact of L1 use on the *nature* and number of LREs in collaborative work. Hence, the present study has been an attempt to address this issue. The current study was in fact a part of a larger study on collaborative pair work, which was conducted in an EFL setting to investigate the impacts of EFL learners' use of their L1 on the acquisition of morphosyntax. The study employed both quantitative and qualitative data analysis procedures, assuming that mere quantification of interactional features by itself cannot be revealing enough. More specifically, the study focused on the impact of L1 use on learners' interactional talk in terms of LREs in the process of second language learning. Thus, the following questions were addressed:

1. Do learners in L1-allowed pairs produce more LREs than those in L1-not-allowed pairs in performing form-focused tasks?

2. Is there a difference between the L1-allowed and L1-not-allowed pairs in terms of the nature of the LREs they produce?

2. Methodology

The study was conducted in a private English language teaching institute in Iran -- Kish Air Institute (KAI), which offers language courses in order to help learners develop the four skills of listening, speaking, reading and writing. Classes meet twice a week for 90 minutes each session. There are 15 terms each of which lasts for 10 weeks. Students have to pass quizzes and final exams to promote to the next level. The medium of instruction is English and the teachers are required not to allow the learners to use L1 in class. L1 is believed to negatively affect the students' language learning.

2.1 Participants

The study was conducted with the students of pre-intermediate level. The data were collected from 24 EFL students from two intact classes, who agreed to participate in the study. There were 11 students in class A and 13 in class B. They were all female students and their ages ranged between 17 and 30, with the mean age of 21. Students in class A were required to complete the tasks in pairs and were allowed to use their L1, so they are referred to as Persian-allowed group. Those in class B were also required to conduct the same tasks in pairs, yet they were told not to use their L1 while performing the task and they are referred to as Persian-not-allowed group.

Almost all the participating students had been studying in this institute for more than a year and they were classmates and knew each other. Thus, they were seen eager to work with a particular partner, and they were allowed to self-select their partners so that they would feel at ease in negotiating over the completion of the tasks. Due to the intact nature of the classes and the impossibility of changing the number of students on the one hand and the odd number of students in each class (11 in class A and 13 in class B) on the other, there had to be four pairs and one group of three in class A and five pairs and one group of three in class B.

2.2 Materials

The participants were assigned to complete four text-editing tasks. They came from a fourth semester content-based course (see Appendix A) during the term as part of the requirements of the course**.** The reason for choosing the text-editing tasks was that they are believed to help learners become aware of their linguistic gaps **(**Storch, 2001**).** The texts for editing were selected from among their own performance. That is, one text with the most serious grammatical mistakes in terms of certain grammatical morphemes was chosen each week to be edited in pair for both classes in the following week.

2.3 Data collection procedures

The data collection was carried out during a regular ten-week course at KAI. During the odd weeks (weeks 1, 3, 5, 7), the students, as part of their course requirements, studied a unit from their textbook. Then on the basis of their textbook, they individually wrote a paragraph to relate their own experiences to the topic at hand outside the class. The students' individual assignments in the two classes were checked in terms of their accuracy of performance on the designated grammatical morphemes. The writing with the greatest number of errors on grammatical morphemes was then chosen for editing for the even weeks (weeks 2, 4, 6, 8). The reason for focusing on a certain number of morphemes was that the frequency of morphosyntactic errors made by the learners at this level was so high that made us take them into account.

The students' talk was recorded as they were completing the tasks in pairs. To ensure more natural performance on the part of the participants, recording of the participants' talks was started prior to the real data collection session. Due to a technical failure in students' recorded pair talk in group B for the first task, the performances of the students of the two groups on tasks 2, 3, and 4 were compared, and the data taken from group A in their first performance had to be ignored. In fact, the task could not be repeated for the lack of time as this was found later after its completion.

2.4 Data analysis procedure

To answer the research questions posed above, the transcripts of the students' collaborative talks were coded into Language-Related Episodes (LREs). Following the work of Storch (2007), LREs were coded as Interactive, i.e. both participants in the pair decided over the correct form; and Non-interactive, i.e. only one participant was involved in the decision-making process. Also, LREs were coded based on the outcome of the completion of the task in pairs, i.e. the correct outcomes were coded as correct ($\sqrt{}$), the incorrect outcomes were coded as incorrect (x), and if the participants could not come up with a decision, it was coded as

unresolved (?). The incidence of LREs was quantitatively analyzed first and then the participants' collaborative speech in both classes was qualitatively examined on the assumption that it would shed more light on how L1 use affects the process of second language learning. Also, the time spent for completing the tasks was computed for the pairs in each of the two classes to determine the differences, if any, between the two classes in terms of time on task due to L1 use/non-use. Finally, to strengthen the results, the recorded talk from group B (Persian-not-allowed group) was analyzed to see if learners switched to utilize their L1, and as they did shift to use their L1, the number of turns in L1 in group B was counted to examine how much L1 was used for each task.

3. Results

3.1 Quantitative analysis

A quantitative analysis of data was carried out to compare the overall number of LREs and the frequency of interactive and non-interactive LREs as well as their resolutions in the L1-allowed (group A) and L1-not-allowed (group B) classes. The quantitative analysis was then complemented with a qualitative analysis, using extracts from the participants' written performances to provide evidence as to how L1 contributes to L2 development. Since the pairs in the Persian not-allowed class also resorted to their mother tongue in certain cases, the episodes in the pair talk of these students were also singled out and analyzed to determine the function of L1 in such pairs.

3.2 Quantitative analysis of the LREs for groups A and B

The quantitative analysis of the participants' collaborative talk from the two groups (Table 1) showed that the number of language-related episodes in all tasks was greater for group A than group B.

Table 1. The number of LREs in groups A and B

	Group A	Group B
Interactive LREs	148 (87%)	88 (61%)
Non-Interactive LREs	22 (13%)	55 (39%)
Total	170	143

In other words, those pairs who were allowed to use their L1 while collaborating produced more LREs (*170*) than those in group B, who were told to only use their L2 (143). Independent Samples T-test revealed that the difference between groups A and B was statistically significant (F = 8.442, df = 6, p < 0.027) in task 3 in terms of the incidence of LREs. The results of the T-tests for tasks 2 and 4, however, did not show a significant difference for the two groups (task 2: F = 3.830, df = 9, p > 0.82; task 4: F = 0.16, df = 8, p > 0.903), though in both cases in favor of the L1-allowed groups. Figure 1 shows the average number of LREs produced by each pair in the two groups.

Figure1 The Incidence of LREs for Tasks 2, 3,and 4
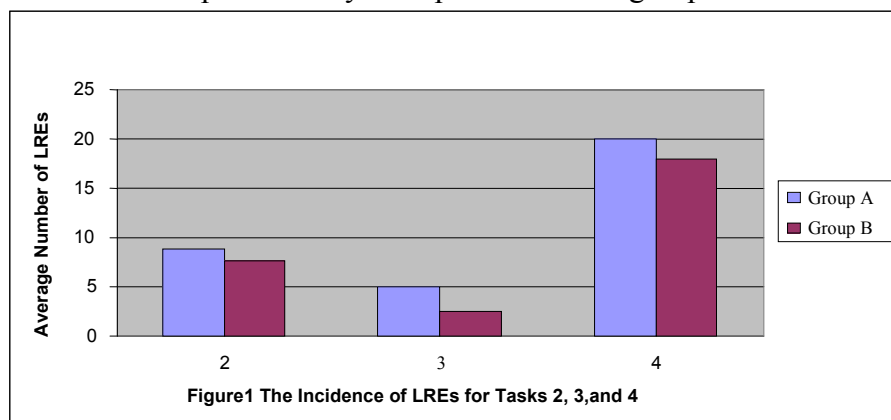
Besides the greater number of LREs in the L1-allowed mode of text-editing activities, the findings show, as in Tables 2 and 3, that a greater percentage of LREs was interactive in the L1-allowed class (87.57%) than in the L1-not-allowed one (61.53%). More importantly, the percentage of the incorrectly resolved LREs was considerably higher in

the L1-not-allowed group (13.63%) than that in the L1-allowed group (only 3.37%).

As far as the resolution of LREs was concerned, it might be claimed that no LRE remained undecided in group B (L1-not-allowed) whether in interactive or non-interactive modes. This might be taken as a piece of evidence in favor of L1-not-allowed group. The fact of the matter is that in most cases, as will be elaborated on in the qualitative analysis below, the more able member of the pair individually decided about the answer, either correctly or incorrectly, the less able member not knowing why the decision was made that way.

Table 2. Interactive/non-interactive LREs in percentage for group A
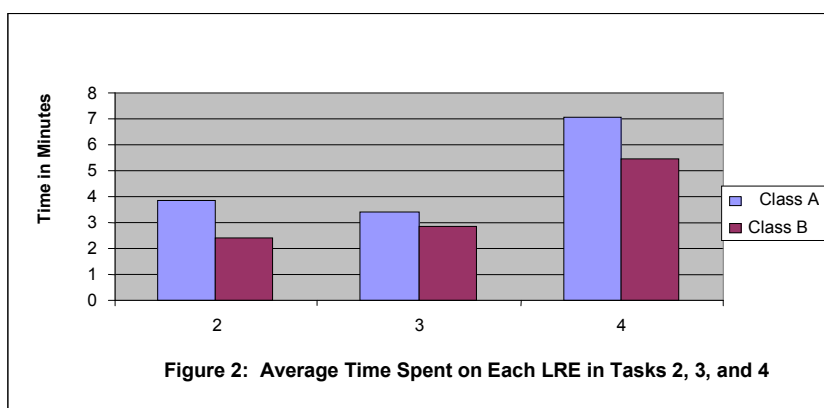(L1-allowed)

Interactive				Non-interactive		
	√ (%)	X (%)	? (%)	√ (%)	X (%)	? (%)
Task 2	96.70	2.19	1.09	66.66	33.33	0
Task 3	87.5	7.5	5	80	0	20
Task 4	82.35	0	21.42	100	0	0
	92.56	3.37	4.05	77.27	18.18	4.54
Total	87.57			12.43		

Table 3. Interactive/non-interactive LREs in percentage for group B
(L1-not-allowed)

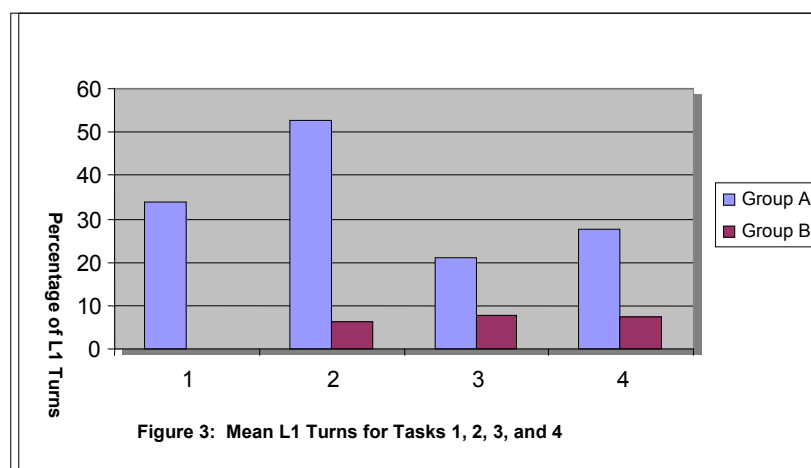| Interactive				Non-interactive		
	√ (%)	X (%)	? (%)	√ (%)	X (%)	? (%)
Task 2	86.95	13.04	0	85	15	0
Task 3	85.29	14.70	0	66.66	33.33	0
Task 4	87.5	12.5	0	100	0	0
	61.53			38.47		

3.3 Time on task and L1-turns

As far as the time spent on tasks is concerned, learners in group A spent more time than learners in group B to resolve the problems in all the three tasks. A glance at Figure 2 reveals that, on average, the pairs in class A spent more time on task than those in class B in all the three tasks. More elaboration on why this happened will appear in the qualitative analysis of the data.

Figure 2: Average Time Spent on Each LRE in Tasks 2, 3, and 4

As to the participants' L1 use, did the participants in the L1-not-allowed group stick to the researcher's instruction and avoid using L1 while performing the tasks? An analysis of the data showed that participants in both groups used their L1 during task completion, though to different degrees, meaning that the participants in group B also reverted to their L1 when its use was deemed unavoidable. In other words, as Figure 3 shows, almost 10 percent of the turns were in the participants' L1 in tasks 2, 3 and 4 in class B. (As mentioned in the methodology section, due to the technical failure in recording students' pair talk in group B for the first task, only group A's L1 use in this task has been presented below.).

Also, does L1 use increase or decrease in the course of time if learners are allowed to benefit from it in completing tasks? A glance at Figure 3 again indicates that although there was not a steady decline in L1 use in performing the required tasks, the overall trend seems to be in favor of sticking more and more to target language and diminishing L1. This

means that, more often than not, learners will revert to their L1 when they think it is not possible to deal with the task at hand in the language they have not mastered fully yet and feel forced to benefit from L1.

Figure 3: Mean L1 Turns for Tasks 1, 2, 3, and 4

In a nutshell, the analysis of the number of LREs in the two groups showed that the participants in L1-allowed group produced more LREs than those in the other group. Besides, participants were involved in more interactive collaboration than those in the L1-not-allowed group. It was also shown that learners in group A spent more time on task to deal with the tasks at hand. As to the use of L1, learners in both groups did shift to L1, though to different degrees, to benefit from it in solving the problem at hand. The participants' interactions in groups A and B were analyzed qualitatively as well to shed more light on the nature of LREs and the effects of L1 use on learners' collaborative work.

Qualitative analysis

The analysis of the participants' pair work in the L1-allowed and L1-not-allowed classes showed that the participants in the two groups were not the same in terms of their ability to maneuver in dealing with the problems at hand. More specifically, the participants in group A with the permission to use their mother tongue, wherever necessary, appealed to it for various essential purposes, e.g. for providing justification for the changes suggested, voicing their doubts, exchanging help, exploring

alternatives, correcting themselves and their partners, and semantic retrieval. All these rendered the LREs in the L1-allowed class greater in number, longer, and more interactive. It is interesting to note that students in group B sometimes, out of despair, shifted to their L1 even though not allowed to do so to complete the tasks they had been assigned.

The excerpts appearing below from the performances of the participants from the two classes provide evidence for the superiority of L1-allowed group.

Episode 1, Group A

1   S2: *'interesteting'* Ghalat nist?. *[Is 'interesteting' not wrong?]*
2   S1: Chera ghalateh? *[Why do you think it is wrong?]*
3   S2: interesteting, interesting
4   S1: *'ed'* barayeh ensan miad *['ed' is used for human]*
5   S2:   *'ed'* Na ke, interested, interesting, Dorosteh. *['ed' no. interested, interesting. It is correct.]*
6   S1: Dorosteh *[It is correct]*

Editing the sentence, 'I'm write to explain interesting and beautiful place in my country', S2 doubtfully inserts extra letters (te) into the word 'interesting', pronounces it, and then voices her doubt in the form of a question in L1 (L. 1). S1, who is not bothered by the S2' wrong pronunciation, asks why 'interesting' should be wrong. Once again S2 incorrectly repeats the word 'interesting', then pauses and pronounces it correctly. S1 insists on not changing the word 'interesting' to 'interested'. Then S2 corrects herself by saying 'it is correct' in line 5, which is followed by S1's agreement (6). L1 was used here as a tool to enable learners to verbalize their doubts and provide explanations for their claims. Now compare what happened in group B, where the participants had to deal with the same problem without the help of L1.

Episode 1, Group B

    1   S2: "interesting"

    2   S1: interesting

    3   S2: interest …. Interesting

    4   S1: ("I'm write to explain" not ok, ok.)

In this episode, S2 seems to be skeptic about the form of the word 'interesting' because after facing it, she stops reading the text. She does not mention what the problem is; then, S1 utters the same word. In the next turn, S2 shows her doubt by saying the different form of the word which is 'interest', and continues after a pause repeating the word 'interesting'. The pair's inability to pose and deal with the problem in L2 and their not being allowed to discuss the issue in L1, render their interaction short and curtailed; they jump to the next issue without attending to the problem sufficiently and learning from the discussion. Now look at another similar excerpt from both groups to compare their linguistic behaviors.

Episode 2, Group A

    1   S1: "A lot of handmade<u>s</u> product show "

    2   S2: [handmade product<u>s</u>]

    3   S1: Aha. "shows the importance"

    4   S2: "show"

    5   S1: "show "

    6   S2: Aha,. Chon *a lot of*, '*s*' nemigireh. Jam hast digeh. *[Because 'a lot of' doesn't take 's'. It is plural, Ok]*

L1 is here employed to provide justification for the changes the pair made to the text. S1, who is doing the reading, adds a plural *s* to the words 'handmades', which is corrected by her partner. They correctly change the wrong parts. In the end, benefitting from the metalanguage in L1, S2 explains the reason why they omitted the third person *s* from the verb 'show'. She mentions that the expression 'a lot of' indicates that the following word is to be in the plural form. This also justifies her decision in adding *s* to the word 'product'. However, in the following episode it

can be observed that the two learners are not able to discuss the problem they face without access to L1. The same also happened in episode 3 below.

Episode 3, Group A
S1: "with them but they pay no attention"
S2: mm.
S1: "but they"
S2: Be ma'ni gozashtast. *[It is in the past]*
S1: Behtar bood intori minvesht: They <u>didn't pay attention</u>. *[It'd be better to write: They didn't pay attention]*.
But they. Eshkal nadareh khat bezan. *[No problem. Cross it out.]*
S2: But they <u>didn't pay attention.</u>

Similarly, L1 is used in episode 3 above in seeking alternatives. The pair face the form 'they pay no attention. S2 reasons that it should be in the past form and verbalizes her thought in Persian. This helps S1 to accept the alternative and write the correct form, i.e., 'they didn't pay attention' in 5. Now compare the above interactions with that in Episode 2, Group B.

Episode 2, Group B
S1: " A lot of handmade product"
S2: Handmade, a lot of handmade
S1: Handmade … handmade product
S2: No, no. Lots of handmade. Lots of.
S1: Lots of handmade, lots of handmade product show, product show, "show the importance of culture of Iran"
S2: "in previous centuries"
S1: "I hope to meet you soon in Iran."

Here, similar to Episode 2 in Group A above, the only change that the pair make to the same part of the text to be revised is the quantity expression 'a lot of', which is changed to 'lots of' by S2. However, she seems not to be able to explain in the target language why she believes it

to preferable to 'a lot of'. Presumably being aware of S2's inability to justify her suggestion, S1 does not even stop to ask for the reason. She takes up the phrase without figuring out the difference between the two versions of the same quantifier, defeating the purpose of doing the task. Consider another function of the first language in the episode below.

Episode 3, Group A
S1: "I hear that"
S2: [I hear that]
S1: Man mishnavam.Man shenidam. I heard that. *[I hear. I heard. I heard that.]* I <u>heard</u> that it is strong against
S2: [heard that it is strong against]

In the above episode the two learners make use of their L1 to come up with the correct verb tense. To figure out the correct form of the verb, S1 switches to L1 and has a private speech in Persian to figure out which of the two alternatives fits the context. Besides helping her to get to the right answer, this speech also provides her partner with the reason for choosing the past tense. However, such problems are dealt with unilaterally by either member of the pairs individually in Group B. For instance,

Episode 3, Group B
(S1: and near jungle
 S2: near jungle
 S1: near to jungle)
S2: I hear, I heard that
S1: that it is strong against earthquake

In the above excerpt, S1 adds the preposition 'to' to the expression 'near jungle', without giving the reason for that. S2 does not require any reason for the suggestion either. Likewise, correction is made concerning the tense of the verb 'hear' by S2 herself without any explanation. This lack of negotiation is frequently repeated throughout learners' pair talks from

group B. Absence of L1 as a psychological tool during the fulfillment of the task has affected learners' performance in different respects, i.e., length of task completion time, degree of interactivity, the number of LREs, as well as the degree of accuracy of editing.

Analysis of L1 use in Group B and its functions

Having noticed that the participants in Group B also shifted to their L1 intermittently despite being urged not to do so, the researchers analyzed the data to see if the talks in the learners' mother tongue were off-task ones or were appealed to as a consequence of desperation. In most cases, the latter was the case, the participants reverting to their L1 to assist them to get their meaning across otherwise impossible. Two excerpts are mentioned below just as examples.

Excerpt *1*

S1: "He love her". The time of the sentence is in the past, "Lov<u>ed</u> her".

S2: "lov<u>ed</u>"

S1: "lov<u>ed</u>. The two doct<u>ors</u> search<u>ed</u> about their…. Their family disagree,   disagr<u>eed</u>, xxx. He <u>had disagreed.</u> Yani ye etefagh ke faghat, ke dar gozashteh oftadeh basheh ke nabodeh.

 [This means that it wasn't just an event to have happened in the past]]

S2: <u>had disagreed</u>

S1: "They paid, they <u>paid</u> no attention. During their search an alien from other planet <u>fell</u> in love with her.

S2: <u>had fall.</u>

S1: <u>had fell</u>. Gozashteh e *'fall'* chi misheh? *[What is the past form of 'fall'?]* "The alien want to carry her to his planet. He <u>had want</u> to marry her.

S2:   Ye zamani ghabl az zamaneh gozashteh dareh. *[It means it is past participle]*

S1:   he <u>had wanted.</u>

.

.

.

S2:   to marry him.
S1:   [to marry him]. "Then the alien, killed?" had killed? …
Eshtebah kardim. Hameh ja in dareh migeh *'during the search'*. Ghablesh
ham eshtebah kardim.
*[We made a mistake. In all cases it says 'during the search'. We made a
mistake before this as well.]*
The two learners move from the present form of 'disagree' to its past
form 'disagreed' and then to past perfect 'had disagreed'. Opting for past
perfect tense as the correct tense for the sentence, but not being able to
explain why she thinks so, S1 resorts to L1 to justify the change she
believes is to be made to the sentence. The same happens in turn 12,
where S2, under the influence of S1, sides with the past perfect tense
rather than simple past. However, in turn 19, S1 who was always
insisting to have past perfect tense, changes her mind and opts now for
the past tense again. Similar to L1 allowed pairs, the pair here logically
assume that they can benefit from the potential of L1 in solving the
problem otherwise impossible and do use it.

Excerpt 2
1   S1: "they also saw a spaceship there next to coffin".
2   S2: "then they carried"
3   S1: they carried
4   S2: carried
5   S1: Vojood dasht? *[There were?]*
6   S2:   *'were'* bayad begireh. *[it must take 'were']*
7   S1: Na digh. *[No]*
8   S2:   xxx, Ageh intor bood bayad akhar miomad. *[If it were like this,
        it must have come in the end]*
9   S1: "they also saw a spaceship next to coffin".
10 S2:   they are carried.
11 S1:   they carried them.
Having dealt with the past tense of the verb 'carry' and agreed on the
choice, S1 goes back to the first sentence and under the influence of their

mother tongue doubts whether 'there' is an expletive, which needs to be followed by a copula. This suggestion is immediately taken up by S2, who proposes 'were' for this purpose. S1 seems to have changed her mind, but S2 preemptively disagrees with S1's idea of its being an adverb of place. All this is rendered in the learners' mother tongue, presumably due to their inability to convey the ideas in the target language, especially the last one.

4. Discussion

The analyses of students' collaborative talk revealed that those learners who were allowed to use their L1 in carrying out editing tasks in pair produced more LREs than those in L1-not-allowed pairs. Though the differences in the number of LREs produced in the two classes were not statistically significant in all the three tasks, the trend was generally in favor of the L1-allowed group. In other words, those learners who had the permission to use their L1 were engaged in more peer-peer interaction to find solutions to their linguistic problems. Unlike the students in the L1-allowed class, those in class B opted more for quick, *individual* resolution of the problems. Interestingly, though students in group B were told not to use their L1 while completing the tasks, there were quite a number of cases in which they switched to L1, assuming that it was impossible to solve the problem at hand without reverting to their mother tongue.

As to the functions of L1, certain functions have been mentioned in previous research for L1 use in the process of SLA, e.g. reverting to it when learners are faced with a cognitively demanding task (Scott & Fuente, 2008), or when they want to express agreement and disagreement (Swain & Lapkin, 2000), or translating the words or sentences into their first language to decide about the form of the text (Storch & Wigglesworth, 2003; Swain & Lapkin, 2000). Besides performing the above functions, the findings of the present study indicate that L1 can be of the following benefits as well: provision of explanations for the suggestions made in the pair/group, and rendering sharing ideas possible

instead of unilateral solution of problems. These are of utmost significance from Vygotsky's sociocultural perspective of second language development. According to this view, as Wells (1999) cites, "whenever people collaborate in an activity, each can assist the others, and each can learn from the contributions of the others" (p. 333). The collaboration can lead to the *discovery* of new concepts and rules by the members of the group while interacting with each other in completing the task at hand; more importantly, it can assist in *appropriating* the other members' understanding of the new concepts and rules when these concepts and rules are explained to and accepted by the member who is unaware of them. Hence if the knowing member of the group is incapable of explaining the related rule in the target language, it seems advisable to allow him/her to benefit from the potential of his/her first language to assist his/her partners.

 Scott and Fuente (2008) argue that "exclusive use of L2 during consciousness-raising, form-focused tasks may impose cognitive demands on learners" (p. 109). They suggest that the use of L1 for such tasks "may reduce cognitive overload, sustain collaborative interaction, and foster the development of meta-linguistic terminology" (p. 109). Likewise, Swain and Lapkin (1998) found out that their two French learners made use of their L1 during collaborative activities, and their L1 was "a mediational tool fully available to them, to regulate their own behavior, to focus attention on specific L2 structures, and to generate and assess alternatives" (p. 333). Centeno-Cortes and Jimenez-Jimenez (2004) reported that learners at the advance level used L1 when the problem became too difficult.

The findings of the current study corroborate the claim made in other studies that there is no room for L2 teachers to worry about learners' use of L1 in class activities for several reasons. First of all, contrary to many teachers' beliefs, students tend to use L1 sparingly if they are given the right instruction. Second, more often than not, this will not divert them from the task at hand to off-task talk. Third, those learners with limited proficiency in the target language and obliged to perform in it normally

tend to resort to any tool available to solve their communication problems, and if L1 is the only and the most efficient tool at hand, they may not abide by the teachers' advice or even command to use only L2. Finally, as Figure 3 roughly indicates, the learners' use of L1 may naturally decrease in the course of time as they find out that their English is improving and they are able to communicate efficiently in the newly acquired language.

5. Conclusion

The analysis of learners' pair talk showed that teachers were right in reporting that their students shift to their L1 during pair and small group work. However, the findings from the current study suggest that foreign language teachers need to revise their view of students' *misuse* of L1 in carrying out collaborative language-related tasks. The result of the present study and other studies mentioned above shows that learners benefit from their first language during the completion of language-related tasks in pairs. While we do not encourage the use of L1 in our classrooms, what we have to be most concerned about is learners' involvement in collaborative interaction. Students are not to be discouraged from using L1 if this enhances collaboration. From the sociocultural perspective, this will provide scaffolded help, which is of utmost necessity for cognitive as well as linguistic development.

References

Anton, M. & DiCamilla, F. (1998). Socio-cognitive functions of L1 collaborative interactions in the L2 classroom. *The Canadian Modern Language Review, 54,* 314-42.

Bejarano, Y. (1987). A cooperative small group methodology in the language Classroom. *TESOL Quarterly, 21*, 481-504.

Brooks-Lewis, K. A. (2009). Adult learners' perceptions of the incorporation of their L1 in foreign language teaching and learning. *Applied Linguistics*, 30 (2), 216-235.

Brooks, F. B. & Donato, R. (1994). Vygotskian approaches to understanding foreign language learner discourse during communicative tasks. *Hispania, 77*, 262-274.

Brown, H. D. (2001). *Teaching by principles: An interactive approach to language pedagogy*. (2nd Ed.). White Plains, NY: Pearson Education.

Carless, D. (2008).   Student use of the mother tongue in the task-based classroom. *ELT Journal, 62,* 331-338.

Centeno-Cortés, B. & Jiménez, A. F. J. (2004). Problem-solving tasks in a foreign language: The importance of the L1 in private verbal thinking. *International Journal of Applied Linguistics, 14,* 7-35.

Doughty, C. M. & Long, H. M. (2003). *The handbook of second language acquisition.* Oxford. BLACKWELL Publishing.

Donato, R. (2004). Aspects of collaboration in pedagogical discourse. *Annual Review of Applied Linguistics, 24,* 284-302.

Donato, R. and McCormick, D. (1994). A sociological perspective on language learning strategies: The role of mediation. *The Modern Language Journal, 78 (iv),* 453-464.

Ewald, D. J (2005). Language-related episodes in an assessment context: A 'small-group quiz', *The Canadian Modern Language Review, 61,* 565-586

Jackson, O. D. (2001). Language-related episodes. *ELT Journal, 55,* 298-299.

Kim, Y. (2008). The contribution of colaborative and individual tasks to the acquisition of L2 vocabulary. *The Modern Language Journal, 92,* 114-130.

Krashen, D. S. (1981). *Second language acquisition and second language learning.* Oxford: Pergamon Press.

Leeser, J. M. (2004). Learner proficiency and focus on form during collaborative dialogue. *Language Teaching Research, 8,* 55-81.

Long, M. H. (1983). Native speaker/non-native speaker conversation and the negotiation of comprehensible input. *Applied Linguistics, 4,* 126-141.

Long, H. M. & Porter, A. P. (1985). Group work, interlanguage talk, and second language acquisition. *TESOL Quarterly, 19,* 207-227.

Pica, T. (1994). Research on negotiation: What does it reveal about second- language   learning conditions, processes, and outcomes? *Language Learning, 44,* 493-527.

Ross-Feldman, L. (2007). Interaction in the L2 classroom: does gender influence learning opportunities? In Mackey, A, (Ed.). *Conversational Interaction in Second Language acquisition,* Oxford University Press, 53-77.

Scott, V. M. & Fuente, M. J. D. L. (2008). What's the problem? L2 learners' use of the L1 during consciousness-raising, form-focused tasks. *The Modern Language Journal, 92,* 100-113.

Storch, N. (1998). A classroom-based study: Insights from a collaborative, text reconstruction task. *ELT Journal, 52,* 291-300.

Storch, N. (2001). *An investigation into the nature of pair work in an ESL classroom and its effect on grammatical development* Unpublished doctoral dissertation: the University of Melbourne.

Storch, N. (2007). Investigating the merits of pair work on a text editing task in ESL classes. *Language Teaching Research, 11,* 143-159.

Storch, N. & Wigglesworth, G. (2003). Is there a role for the use of the L1 in an L2 setting? *TESOL Quarterly, 37,* 760-70.

Swain, M. & Lapkin, S. (1995). Problems in output and the cognitive processes they generate: A step towards second language learning. *Applied Linguistics, 16,* 371-391.

Swain, M. & Lapkin, S. (1998). Interaction and second language learning: Two adolescent French immersion students working together. *The Modern Language Journal, 82,* 320-33.

Swain, M. & Lapkin, S. (2000). Task-based second language learning: The uses of the first language. *Language Learning Research, 4,* 251-274.

Vygotsky, L. S. (1978). *Mind in society: The development of higher psychological processes.* CAMBRIDGE, MA: Harvard University Press.

Upton, T. A. & Lee-Thompson, L. (2001). The role of the first language in second language reading. *Studies in Second Language Acquisition*, 23, 469-495.

Appendix A

Task 1

Toby was in bad shape and overweight, and one day his wife give him a surprise birthday present: one week at a health spa! When he go to the health spa, he couldn't handle himself and all the time he had kept on eating and smoking and eating and smoking …! But his wife get angry very soon and forced him to loose weight. Finally after all these things, he made a serious decision to loose weight and change to a great and good shape. Then he eat less and exercise very hard and he go on a diet. A week after that day, he loose 20 kg and he will keep himself in good shape with his programs.

Task 2

Dear friend,

I'm write to explain interesting and beautiful place in my country. As a tourist you can visit some city like Esfehan, Shiraz, Kerman, Tabriz, …. There is a lot of old building, shrine, and museum in these city.

Iranian civilization back to 7000 years ago. A lot of handmade product shows the importance of the culture of Iran in previous centuries.

I hope to meet you soon in Iran.

Best wishes,

Task 3

There are some building in our town (Chalous). I like one of them very much. I think I like more than one building, about four or five building in Chalous. There is one on top of Chalous. I think that this building is very interesting because this building have a very beautiful and good view and from there we can see all of Chalous. Because of this the name of that building is Baam Chalous. It is on Navvab Street and near jungle. I hear that it is strong against earthquake. Units in this big building is very expensive. You have to be very rich for buying one unit in this building.

Task 4

There were two doctor, a man and a woman. They were married. She was very beautiful. He love her. The two doctor search about UFOs. Their family disagree with them but they pay no attention. During their search,

an alien from other planet fall in love with her. The alien want to carry her to his planet. He want to marry her and ask her to cure his boss because his boss was sick. But she refused to marry him. Then the alien kill her. Their family called police. When police arrive there, they saw the man was alone in her funeral and he put a rose on her coffin. They also saw a spaceship there next to coffin. Then they carry them man. Police were very confused because they didn't know what happen.

The distance from earth was three thousand light years. They had a boss. Their boss was sick. He has a heart attack. The doctor had to operate on his heart and cure him. After that, the boss felt healthy, and then the people that live there decide to have a party. Everybody was happy at the party because of the boss's health, but the doctor was sad because of his wife. After one week, the spaceship come back to earth. They take the doctor with them. When the doctor come back, he went to church and relax there. He spoke with his wife's ghost. Then he went home. He couldn't remember where he was. He never continue to do research about UFOs.

Appendix B

Transcription symbols used
The following transcription symbols were used in exchanges mentioned in this paper:

" "   Quotation marks denote that the participants are reading the given text

…   Short pause, between 0.5 to 3 seconds

[Beginning of simultaneous/overlapping talk (end of this type of talk is shown by])

xxx   Words or phrases difficult to understand

?   Rising intonation at the end of a word or phrase

:   Sharp rise at showing emphasis

.   Downward dots mean that there is a range of exchanges

____   Underlined part shows that the participant edited that part

[Italicized parts]   These parts are the translation for the L1 used by learners.